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(54) **OPTICAL CIRCUIT SWITCH WITH INTEGRAL CIRCULATORS**

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USPC 385/16–18, 20, 21, 24

See application file for complete search history.

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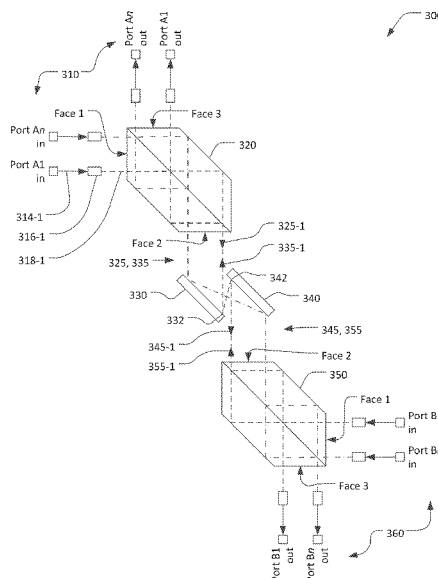
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ABSTRACT

Optical circuit switches and switching methods are described. A first optical circulator may form a first plurality of bidirectional optical beams from a first plurality of input optical beams and a corresponding first plurality of output optical beams. Each bidirectional optical beam may consist of the corresponding input optical beam and the corresponding output optical beam overlaid to follow, in opposing directions, a common optical path. A first mirror array may be disposed to reflect the first plurality of bidirectional optical beams.

10 Claims, 5 Drawing Sheets



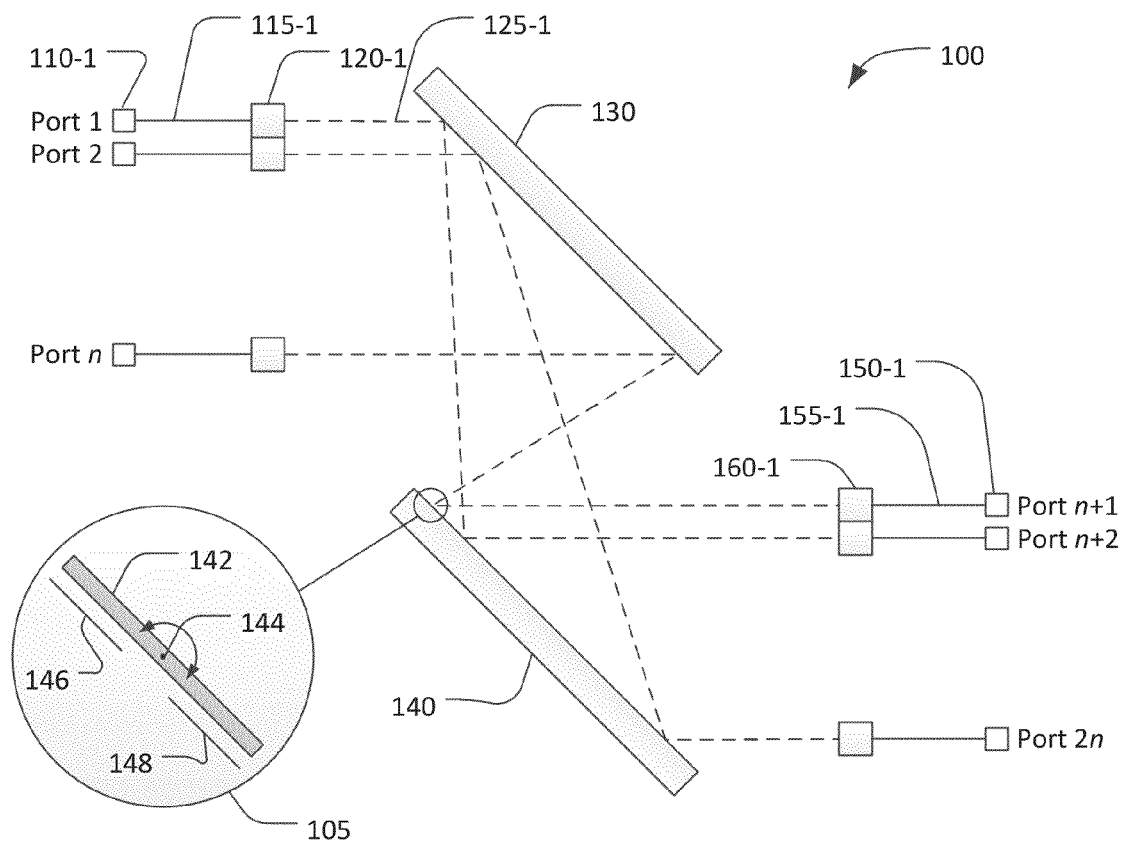


FIG. 1
Prior Art

FIG. 2A

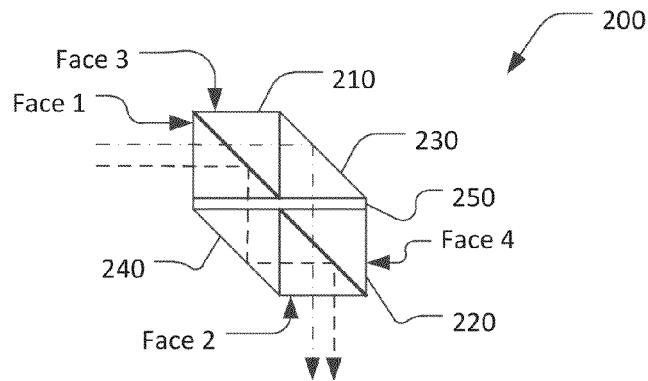


FIG. 2B

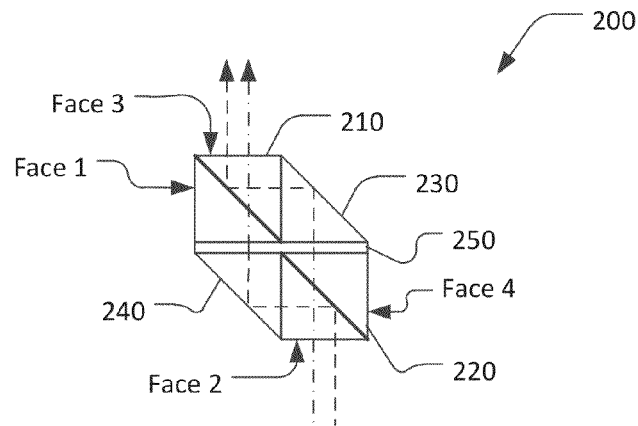


FIG. 2C

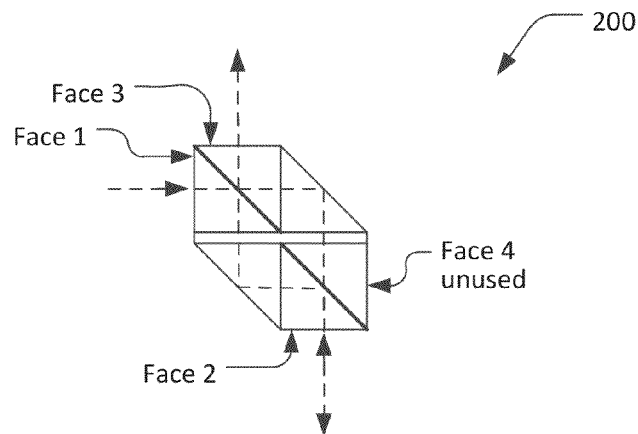


FIG. 2
Prior Art

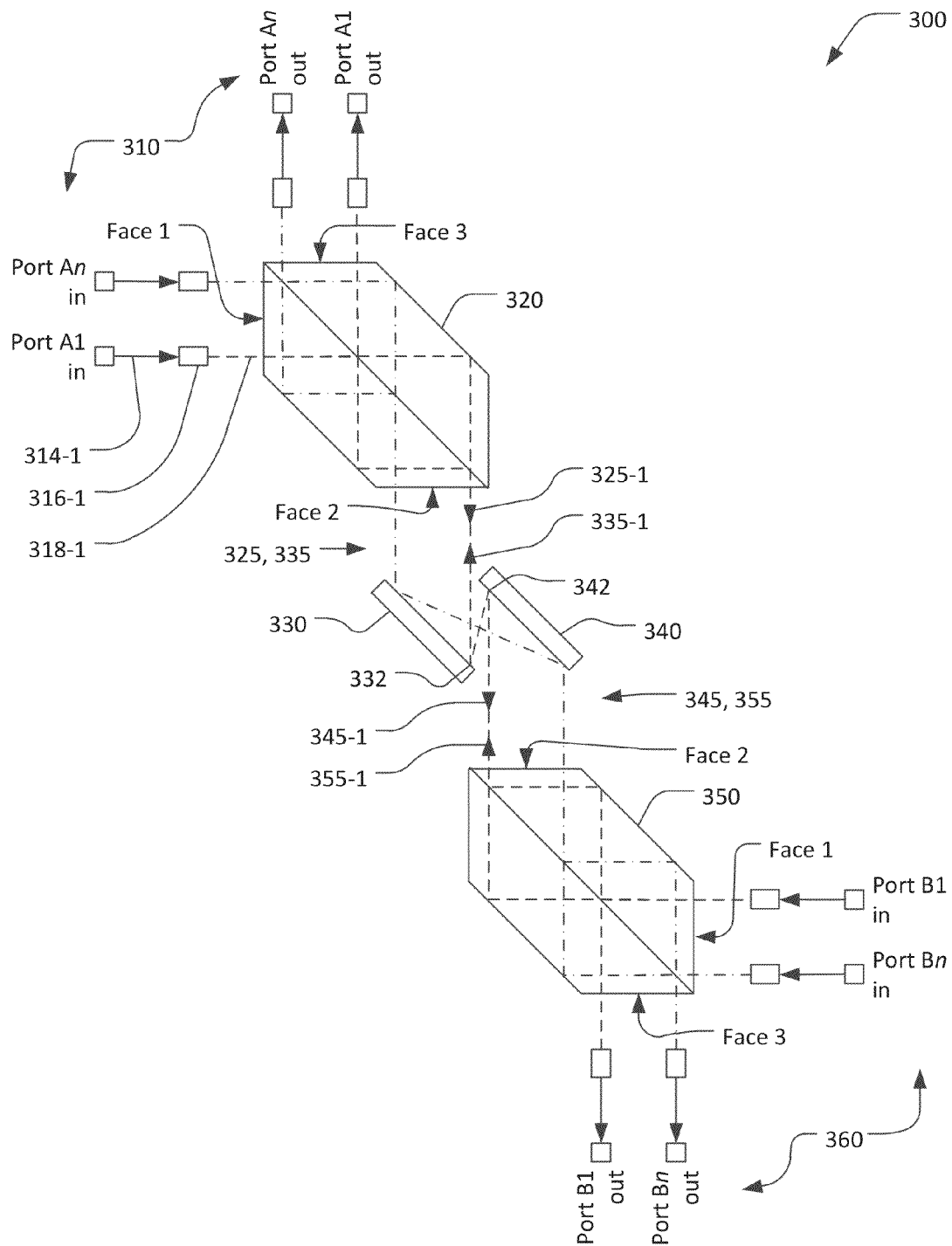


FIG. 3

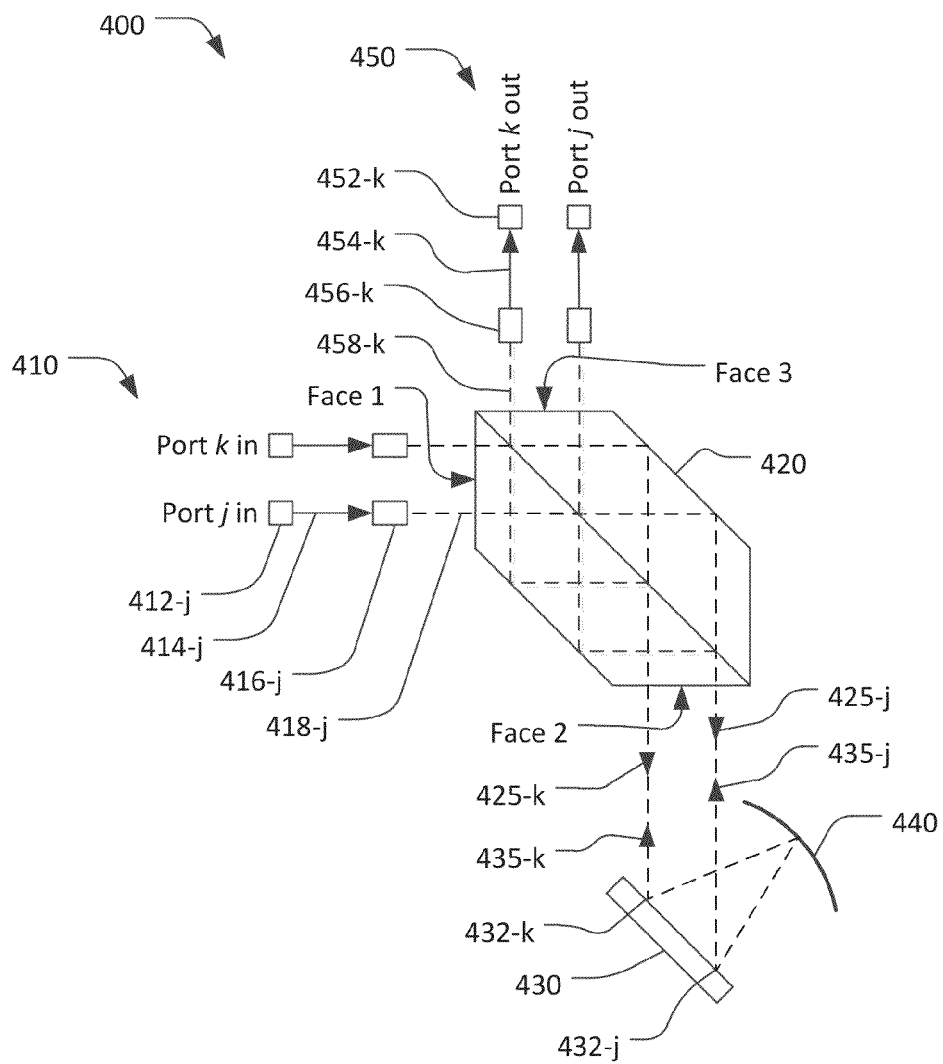


FIG. 4

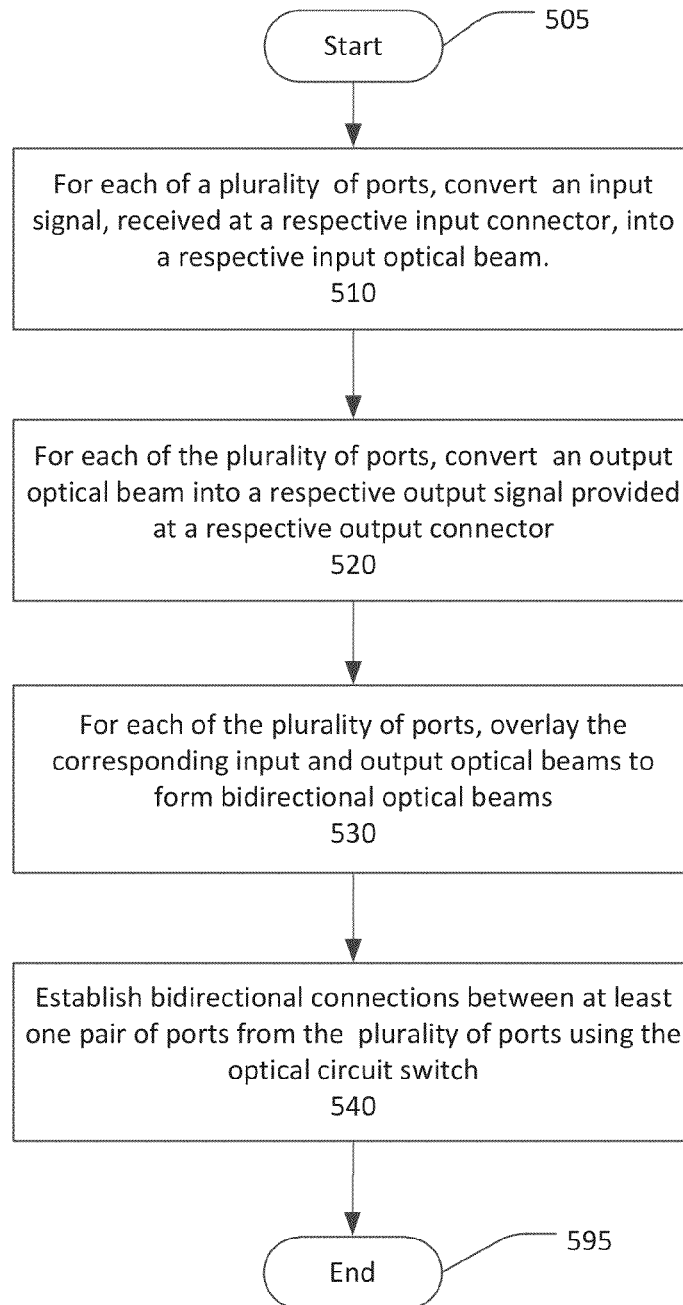
500

FIG. 5

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OPTICAL CIRCUIT SWITCH WITH INTEGRAL CIRCULATORS

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BACKGROUND

1. Field

This disclosure relates to optical communications networks and more particularly to optical circuit switches using MEMS (micro-electromechanical system) mirror arrays.

2. Description of the Related Art

Communications networks commonly contain a mesh of transmission paths which intersect at hubs or nodes. At least some of the nodes may include a switching device that receives data or information arriving at the node and retransmits the information along appropriate outgoing paths.

Optical fiber links are commonly used to provide high bandwidth transmission paths between nodes. Such optical fiber links form the backbone of wide area networks such as the Internet. Optical fiber links are also applied in high bandwidth local area networks which may be used, for example, to connect server racks in large data centers or to connect processors in high performance computers.

An optical circuit switch is a switching device that forms connections between pairs of optical fiber communications paths. A typical optical circuit switch may have a plurality of ports and be capable of selectively connecting any port to any other port in pairs. Since an optical circuit switch does not convert information flowing over the optical fiber communication paths to electrical signals, the bandwidth of an optical circuit switch is essentially the same as the bandwidth of the optical communications paths. Further, since an optical circuit switch does not convert information into electrical signals, the power consumption of an optical circuit switch may be substantially lower than a comparable conventional (i.e. electronic) switch.

DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is an optical schematic diagram of an optical circuit switch.

FIG. 2A is an optical schematic diagram of a free space optical circulator.

FIG. 2B is another optical schematic diagram of a free space optical circulator.

FIG. 2C is another optical schematic diagram of a free space optical circulator.

FIG. 3 is an optical schematic diagram of an optical circuit switch with integral optical circulators.

FIG. 4 is an optical schematic diagram of another optical circuit switch with integral optical circulators.

FIG. 5 is a flow chart of a process for optical circuit switching.

Throughout this description, elements appearing in figures are assigned three-digit reference designators, where the most significant digit is the figure number where the element is introduced and the two least significant digits are specific to

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the element. An element that is not described in conjunction with a figure may be presumed to have the same characteristics and function as a previously-described element having the same reference designator.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

Referring now to FIG. 1, an optical circuit switch **100** may be configured to connect a first group of n ports (where n is an integer greater than 1), labeled Port **1** to Port n , to a second group of n ports, labeled Port $n+1$ to Port **2n**. More specifically, the optical circuit switch **100** may selectively connect up to n pairs of ports, where each pair of ports includes a port from the first group and a port from the second group. For ease of description, the first group of ports may be considered as input ports and the second group of ports may be considered as output ports. However, the optical circuit switch **100** may be capable of transferring optical signals in either direction between the first group of ports and the second group of ports.

Each of the input ports (Port **1** to Port n) may include a connector (of which only the connector **110-1** is identified) to receive an optical fiber cable (not shown). Each connector may be coupled by a respective optical fiber (of which only optical fiber **115-1** is identified) to a respective collimator lens (of which only collimator lens **120-1** is identified). Each collimator lens may convert an optical signal from the respective optical fiber into a collimated optical beam (of which only optical beam **125-1** is identified) in free space. Free space optical beams are shown in FIG. 1 as dashed lines. The optical fibers may terminate in a fiber block (not shown), such as, for example, the fiber block described in U.S. Pat. No. 6,819,824. The collimator lenses may be elements of a lens array, such as, for example, the lens array described in U.S. Pat. No. 6,449,098.

Each free space optical beam, such as optical beam **125-1** may be directed onto a first mirror array **130**. The first mirror array **130** may include n mirrors with a one-to-one correspondence between optical beams and mirrors, such that each optical beam is directed onto a respective mirror. To improve the manufacturing yield of the first mirror array **130**, the first mirror array **130** may include more than n mirrors, in which case the n optical beams may be directed to a subset of n mirrors that are known to be fully functional.

A second mirror array **140** may be disposed to intercept some or all of the optical beams reflected from the first mirror array **130**. Although not shown in FIG. 2, additional optical elements, such as a reflector or a lens, may be interposed along the path of the optical beams between the first mirror array and the second mirror array. Each mirror on the first mirror array **130** may direct the respective optical beam to a selected mirror of the second mirror array **140**. The mirrors of the second mirror array **140** may direct the respective optical beam to a corresponding collimator lens (of which only collimator lens **160-1** is identified). Each collimator lens may focus the optical beam into a respective optical fiber (of which only optical fiber **155-1** is identified) that conveys the optical signal to a respective port connector (of which only connector **150-1** is identified).

The optical circuit switch **100** may create a one-to-one connection between some or all of the input port and a corresponding number of the output ports. For example, as shown in FIG. 1, Port **1** is connected to port $n+2$, port **2** is connected to port $2n$, and port n is connected to port $n+1$.

The detail view **105** shows a simplified schematic diagram of a mirror from either the first mirror array **130** or the second mirror array **140**. A reflective mirror element **142** is supported by a pair of torsion bars, of which only a first torsion bar **144**

is visible. The second torsion bar is located on the far side of the mirror element **142** and axially aligned with the first torsion bar **144**. The mirror element **142** may rotate about the axis of the torsions bars, with the torsion bars providing a spring force tending to return the mirror element **142** to a default position. The mirror element may be rotated by electrostatic attraction between the mirror element and either a first electrode **146** or a second electrode **148**. For example, applying a voltage between the first electrode **146** and the mirror element **142** will create an attraction between the mirror element and the first electrode, causing the mirror element to rotate in a counter-clockwise direction. The mirror will rotate until the return force of the torsion bars is equal to the force of the electrostatic attraction. The angular rotation of the mirror element **142** may be approximately proportional to the square of the voltage between the first electrode **146** and the mirror element **142**. Similarly, applying a voltage between the second electrode **148** and the mirror element **142** will cause the mirror to rotate in a clockwise direction.

In the simplified example of FIG. 1, the mirror element **142** rotates about a single axis defined by the torsion bars. Either or both of the first mirror array **130** and the second mirror array may include mirrors configured to independently rotate about two orthogonal axes. In this case, each mirror element may be coupled to a first pair of electrodes to cause clockwise and counter-clockwise rotation about a first axis and a second pair of electrodes to cause clockwise and counter-clockwise rotation about a second axis orthogonal to the first axis. The structure of a mirror array and the associated electrodes may be substantially more complex than that shown in the detail view **105**. For example, U.S. Pat. No. 6,628,041 describes a MEMS mirror array having two-axis mirror motion and comb actuators.

FIG. 2A is an optical schematic diagram of an optical circulator **200** that inputs and outputs free-space optical beams (i.e. optical beams that are not confined in waveguides). The optical circulator **200** includes first and second polarizing beam splitter (PBS) cubes **210**, **220**, first and second prisms **230**, **240**, and a non-reciprocal polarization rotator **250**. The optical circulator **200** has first, second, third, and fourth input/output faces, identified as Face **1** to Face **4**, respectively.

Each PBS cube **210**, **220** may consist of two $45^\circ \times 45^\circ \times 90^\circ$ prisms. A polarization splitting structure is formed on the hypotenuse face of one prism, and the two hypotenuse faces are bonded together to form a cube. The polarization splitting structure on the hypotenuse face may be a multiplayer dielectric coating, in which case each PBS cube **210**, **220** may be referred to as a "MacNeille prism". The polarization splitting structure on the hypotenuse face may be a wire grid polarizer or some other structure.

The polarization state of a light beam passing through the non-reciprocal polarization rotator **250** may be rotated differently depending on the direction of the light beam. In example of FIG. 2, the non-reciprocal polarization rotator **250** does not rotate the polarization direction of light beams passing through from top to bottom (as shown in FIG. 2A), but does rotate the polarization direction of light beams passing from bottom to top by 90 degrees. The non-reciprocal polarization rotator **250** may consist of, for example, a half-wave plate configured to rotate polarization direction by 45 degrees reciprocally and a 45-degree Faraday rotator. The effects of the half-wave plate and the Faraday rotator may be subtractive for light passing from top to bottom (i.e. no net polarization rotation) and additive for light passing from bottom to top (i.e. 90-degree net polarization rotation).

A light beam entering at Face **1** may be considered to have a p-polarized component having a polarization direction lying in the plane of FIG. 2A and an s-polarized component having a polarization direction orthogonal to the plane of FIG. 2A. In FIG. 2A and FIG. 2B, p-polarized components are shown as dot-dash lines and s-polarized components are shown as dashed lines. The p-polarized component of the light beam entering at Face **1** is transmitted through the hypotenuse of the first PBS cube **210**, internally reflected from the hypotenuse of the first prism **230**, transmitted through the non-reciprocal polarization rotator **250** without change, and transmitted through the hypotenuse of PBS the second PBS cube **220**. Thus the p-polarized component exits the optical circulator **200** at Face **2**. The s-polarized component of the light beam entering at Face **1** is reflected from the hypotenuse of the first PBS cube **210**, internally reflected from the hypotenuse of the second prism **240**, transmitted through the non-reciprocal polarization rotator **250** without change, and reflected from the hypotenuse of PBS the second PBS cube **220**. Thus the s-polarized component also exits the optical circulator **200** at Face **2**. The paths lengths through the circulator **700** for the p-polarized component and the s-polarized component may be identical.

FIG. 2B is another optical schematic diagram of the optical circulator **200** with a free-space optical beam entering the circulator at Face **2**. The p-polarized component of the light beam entering at Face **2** is transmitted through the hypotenuse of the second PBS cube **220**, transmitted through the non-reciprocal polarization rotator **250** incurring a 90-degree rotation in polarization direction, internally reflected from the hypotenuse of the first prism **230**, and reflected from the hypotenuse of the first PBS cube **210**. Thus the p-polarized component entering at Face **2** exits the optical circulator **200** at Face **3**. The s-polarized component of the light beam entering at Face **2** is reflected from the hypotenuse of the second PBS cube **220**, internally reflected from the hypotenuse of the second prism **240**, transmitted through the non-reciprocal polarization rotator **250** incurring a 90-degree rotation of polarization direction, and transmitted through the hypotenuse of PBS the first PBS cube **210**. Thus the s-polarized component entering at Face **2** also exits the optical circulator **200** at Face **3**.

FIG. 2C illustrates that the optical circulator **200** can be used to overlay two unidirectional optical beams (i.e. an input beam at Face **1** and an output beam at Face **3**) to form a single bidirectional optical beam at Face **2**. In this context, a "bidirectional optical beam" is defined to be a pair of optical beams proceeding in opposing direction along a common optical path. Exact superimposition of the pair of optical beams is not required. The beam width of the two component beams of a bidirectional optical beam may differ slightly, and the optical axes of the two component beams may be slightly offset. An optical beam incident on Face **1** of the optical circulator **200** will exit at Face **2**. An optical beam incident at Face **2**, coincident with the exiting beam, will exit the optical circulator at Face **3**.

Thus the function of the optical circulator **200** may be described as overlaying the two unidirectional beams that enter and exit the optical circulator at Faces **1** and **3**, respectively, to form a single bidirectional beam that enters and exits at Face **2** of the optical circulator. The function of the optical circulator **200** may also be described as separating the directional components of a bidirectional beam that enters and exits at Face **3** of the optical circulator into two unidirectional beams that enter and exit at Face **1** and Face **2**, respectively. The distinction between "overlaying" and "separating" beams is strictly semantic, and the optical circulator **200** will

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perform the “overlying” and “separating” functions simultaneously. The optical circulator **200** has a fourth Face, Face **4**, which is not used in the optical switches described in this patent. It can be shown the light entering the optical circulator **200** at Face **3** will exit at Face **4**, and light entering the optical circulator **200** at Face **4** will exit at Face **1**.

Referring now to FIG. **3**, an optical circuit switch **300** may be used to connect any of a first group, or A group, of n bidirectional optical ports **310** to a selected one of a second group, or B group, of n bidirectional optical ports **360**. The A group of bidirectional optical ports **310** may include n input connectors, identified as “Port A1 in” to “Port An in”. The A group of bidirectional optical ports **310** may also include n output connectors, identified as “Port A1 out” to “Port An out”. Each A port consists of an input connector and the corresponding output connector. Each input and output connector may be configured to mate with a fiber optical cable (not shown).

Similarly, the B group of bidirectional optical ports **360** may include n input connectors, identified as “Port B1 in” to “Port Bn in”. The B group of bidirectional optical ports **360** may also include n output connectors, identified as “Port B1 out” to “Port Bn out”. Each B port consists of an input connector and the corresponding output connector.

The discussion of the optical circuit switch **300** with first consider optical signals input at the Group A ports at connectors Port A1 in to Port An in., Each A group input connector may be coupled by an input optical fiber, of which only the input optical fiber **314-1** is identified, to a respective input optical collimator, of which only input optical collimator **316-1** is identified. Each input optical collimator may collimate the light from the respective optical fiber into an input optical beam, of which only input optical beam **318-1** is identified. Optical beams are shown in FIG. **3** as dashed lines. n parallel input optical beams may be incident on the Face **1** of the first optical circulator **320**. As previously described with respect to FIG. **2A**, the n optical beams incident on Face **1** will exit the first optical circulator **320** at Face **2** as a first set of optical beams **325**, of which only the optical beam **325-1** is individually identified. For specific example, the optical signal input at Port A1 in may be collimated by the optical collimator **316-1** to form the optical beam **318-1** which is incident on face **1** of the first optical circulator **320**. The beam may propagate through the optical circulator as previously described and exit face **2** of the first optical circulator **320** as the optical beam **325-1**.

Each of the n optical beams **325** exiting Face **2** of the first optical circulator may be incident on a respective mirror of a first mirror array **330**. As described with respect to FIG. **1**, each mirror in the first mirror array **330** may reflect its respective incident beam onto a selected mirror of a second mirror array **340**. The mirrors of the second mirror array **340** may reflect their respective incident beams to form a second set of parallel optical beams **345**, of which only the optical beam **345-1** is individually identified. For specific example, the optical beam **325-1** may reflect from a mirror **332** within the first mirror array **330** and may further reflect from a mirror **342** in the second mirror array **340** to become the optical beam **345-1**. It can be understood the beams within the second set of optical beams **345** may be the same (ignoring attenuation that may occur as the beams are reflected from the MEMS mirror arrays) as the beams within the first set of optical beams **325**, but with the relative spatial locations of the beams reorganized by the action of the first and second mirror arrays **330**, **340**.

The second optical circulator **350** may operate in the same manner as the first optical circulator **320**. Each beam of the

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second group of optical beams **345** may be incident on Face **2** of the second optical circulator **350** and may exit at Face **3** of the second optical circulator **350**. The beams exiting Face **3** of the second optical circulator **350** may be coupled through respective optical collimators and optical fibers to the Group B output connectors, Port B1 out to Port Bn out. These optical fibers and optical collimators are not identified in FIG. **3**, but may be recognized with reference to the input optical fibers **314-1** and collimators **316-1**. For specific example, the optical beam **345-1** may exit face **3** of the second optical circulator and be coupled to Port B1 out. In similar manner, an optical circuit or path may be established from any one of the Group A input connectors (Port A1 in to Port An in) to any one of the Group B output connectors (Port B1 out to Port Bn out). By properly setting the angles of the mirrors in the first and second mirror arrays **330**, **340**, n separate circuits can be made between the Group A input connectors and the Group B output connectors.

At the same time as optical circuits are made between the Group A input connectors and the Group B output connectors, circuits are also made between the corresponding Group B input connectors and the Group A output connectors. Optical signals input at the Group B input connectors are coupled by respective optical fibers to respective optical collimators and converted into respective optical beams. These beams may enter the second optical circulator **350** at Face **1** and may exit the second optical circulator at Face **2** as a third set of optical beams **355**, of which only optical beam **355-1** is individually identified. The third set of optical beams **355** exiting Face **2** of the second optical circulator **350** may be superimposed on their counterpart beams of the second set of optical beams **345**. For example, optical beam **355-1** may be superimposed on optical beam **345-1** propagating in the reverse direction.

Each optical beam of the third set of optical beams **355** may be incident on the same mirror in the second mirror array **340** as the counterpart beam of the second set of optical beams **345**. The second mirror array **340** may reflect each beam to the same mirror in the first mirror array **330** as the counterpart beam of the first set of optical beams **325**. For example, optical beam **355-1** may reflect from mirror **342** of the second mirror array **340** and further reflect from mirror **332** of the first mirror array **330**.

The first mirror array **330** may reflect the beams received from the second mirror array **340** to a fourth set of optical beams **335** incident on Face **2** of the first optical circulator **320**. Each beam of the fourth set of optical beams **335** may be superimposed on the counterpart beam of the first set of optical beams **325**. As previously described with respect to FIG. **2B**, the optical beams of the fourth set of optical beams will exit at Face **3** of the first optical circulator **320**. Each output optical beam may be conveyed to a respective B group output connector via a respective output optical collimator and output optical fiber. The output optical fibers, output optical collimators, and output optical beams are not identified in FIG. **3**, but may be recognized with reference to the input optical fibers, collimators, and beams **314-1**, **316-1**, and **318-1**.

Thus the optical circuit switch **300** can create up to n selected bidirectional optical connections between the A group ports and the B group ports. Specifically, the optical circuit switch can make an optical connection between any A group input connector and a selected B group output connector, while simultaneously making an optical connection between the corresponding B group input connector and the corresponding A group output connector, using the same optical path (in opposing directions) between the first and second optical circulators. Compared to the optical circuit

switch **100** of FIG. **1**, the optical circuit switch **300** of FIG. **3** can establish twice as many optical connections using the same MEMS mirror components.

Referring now to FIG. **4**, an optical circuit switch **400** may be configured to connect a group of n ports **410**, of which Port j in and Port k in are identified, to a group of n output ports **450**, of which Port j out and Port k out are identified. n is an integer greater than one, j and k are integers between 1 and n , and j and k are not equal.

Each of the input ports **410** may be a connector (of which only the connector **412-j** is identified) to receive an optical fiber cable (not shown). Each connector may be coupled by a respective optical fiber (of which only optical fiber **414-j** is identified) to a respective collimator lens (of which only collimator lens **416-j** is identified). Each collimator lens may convert an optical signal from the respective optical fiber into a collimated optical beam (of which only optical beam **418-j** is identified) in free space. Free space optical beams are shown in FIG. **4** as dashed lines.

Each of the output ports **450** may be a connector (of which only the connector **452-k** is identified) to receive an optical fiber cable (not shown). Each connector may be coupled by a respective optical fiber (of which only optical fiber **454-k** is identified) to a respective collimator lens (of which only collimator lens **456-k** is identified). Each collimator lens may receive a respective collimated optical beam (of which only optical beam **458-k** is identified) and focus the optical beam into the respective optical fiber.

First consider an optical signal input to Port j in through a fiber optic cable (not shown) connected to connector **412-j**. The optical signal input to Port j in may be converted into optical beam **418-j**, which is incident on Face **1** of an optical circulator **420**. The optical beam may propagate through the optical circulator **420** as previously described and may exit face **3** of the optical circulator as optical beam **425-j**.

Optical beam **425-j** may be incident on a **432-j** of a mirror array **430**. The mirror **432-j** may be uniquely associated with Port j , which is to say the optical beam from Port j in is always directed to mirror **432-j**. The mirror **432-j** may reflect the optical beam to a reflector **440**, which in turn reflects the optical beam to another mirror **432-k** of the mirror array **430**. The mirror **432-k** may be uniquely associated with Port k . The mirror **432-k** may reflect the optical beam as optical beam **435-k**, which is incident on Face **2** of the optical circulator **420**.

Optical beam **435-k** may propagate through the optical circulator **420** as previously described and may exit face **3** of the optical circulator **420** as optical beam **458-k**. Optical beam **458-k** may be coupled to Port k out via the collimator lens **456-k**, the optical fiber **454-k** and the connector **452-k**. Thus a connection has been made between Port j in and Port k out.

The angle at which mirror **432-j** reflects the incident beam may be controlled by applying one or more voltages to associated electrode to cause the mirror **432-j** to rotate about a single axis or two orthogonal axes. In this example, the voltages applied to the electrodes associated with mirror **432-j** have caused the mirror to rotate such that the incident beam is reflected to mirror **432-k**. Different applied voltages would cause the mirror **432-j** to rotate to some other angle and cause the incident beam to be reflected to some other mirror within the mirror array **430**.

The angle at which mirror **432-k** reflects the incident beam is also controlled by applying one or more voltages to associated electrode to cause the mirror **432-k** to rotate about a single axis or two orthogonal axes. In this example, the voltages applied to the electrodes associated with mirror **432-k**

have caused mirror **432-k** to rotate such that the optical beam **435-k** is reflected in the required direction to pass through the optical circulator and be coupled to Port k out. Different voltage would cause the mirror **432-k** to rotate to some other angle with the result that the desired connection is not made.

Now consider an optical signal input to Port k in. The optical signal input to Port k in may be converted into an optical beam which is incident on Face **1** of the optical circulator **420**. The optical beam may propagate through the optical circulator **420** as previously described and may exit face **3** of the optical circulator as optical beam **425-k**. Note that optical beam **425-k** may be superimposed on optical beam **435-k** propagating in the opposite direction.

Optical beam **425-k** may be incident on the mirror **432-k** of the mirror array **430**. The mirror **432-k** may reflect the optical beam to the reflector **440**, which in turn reflects the optical beam to the mirror **432-j** of the mirror array **430**. The mirror **432-j** may reflect the optical beam as optical beam **435-j**, which is incident on Face **2** of the optical circulator **420**. Note that optical beam **435-j** may be superimposed on optical beam **425-j** propagating in the opposite direction.

Optical beam **435-j** may propagate through the optical circulator **420** as previously described, may exit face **3** of the optical circulator **420**, and may be coupled to Port j out via the respective optical collimator lens, the optical fiber, and connector. Thus a connection has also been made between Port k in and Port j out.

The optical switch **400** may make up to $n/2$ bidirectional connections between selected pair of ports. Selected ports may be connected by setting the corresponding mirrors in the mirror array **430** to appropriate angles, which may be accomplished by providing appropriate driving voltages to electrodes associated with each mirror. The optical switch **400** may be capable of making the same number of optical connections as the optical circuit switch **100**, using only a single MEMS mirror array.

Description of Processes

FIG. **5** is a flow chart of a process **500** for making optical connections. For ease of discussion, the process **500** is shown as a series of consecutive actions between a start at **505** and an end at **595**. However, the process **500** may be continuous and the actions **510-540** occur simultaneously. The process **500** may be performed by an optical circuit switch having a plurality of ports, such as the optical circuit switch **300** or **400**. The process may start at **505** when the optical circuit switch is placed into service and may continue until the optical circuit switch is removed from service at **595**.

Each port of the optical circuit switch may include an input connector to receive an input signal from a fiber optic cable and an output connector to provide an output signal to a fiber optic cable. At **510**, the respective input signal for each of the plurality of ports may be converted into a corresponding input optical beam in free space (i.e. not confined with a waveguide such as an optical fiber). At **520**, a corresponding output optical beam may be converted into an output signal for each of the plurality of ports.

At **530**, the input optical beam and the output optical beam may be overlaid or superimposed such that the input and output optical beams for each port may follow a common optical path (in opposite directions) through the switching elements of the optical circuit switch. The input and output optical beams may be overlaid, for example, by optical circulators such as the optical circulators **320**, **350**, and **420**.

At **540**, optical connections may be established using the optical circuit switch. Connections may be established by applying voltages to set rotation angles of mirrors within mirror arrays, such as the mirror arrays **330**, **340**, and **440**.

Since the input and output beams for each port are overlaid along a common optical path, establishing a connection between the input of a first port and the output of a second port will simultaneously create a connection between the input of the second port and the output of the first port.

Closing Comments

Throughout this description, the embodiments and examples shown should be considered as exemplars, rather than limitations on the apparatus and procedures disclosed or claimed. Although many of the examples presented herein involve specific combinations of method acts or system elements, it should be understood that those acts and those elements may be combined in other ways to accomplish the same objectives. With regard to flowcharts, additional and fewer steps may be taken, and the steps as shown may be combined or further refined to achieve the methods described herein. Acts, elements and features discussed only in connection with one embodiment are not intended to be excluded from a similar role in other embodiments.

As used herein, “plurality” means two or more. As used herein, a “set” of items may include one or more of such items. As used herein, whether in the written description or the claims, the terms “comprising”, “including”, “carrying”, “having”, “containing”, “involving”, and the like are to be understood to be open-ended, i.e., to mean including but not limited to. Only the transitional phrases “consisting of” and “consisting essentially of”, respectively, are closed or semi-closed transitional phrases with respect to claims. Use of ordinal terms such as “first”, “second”, “third”, etc., in the claims to modify a claim element does not by itself connote any priority, precedence, or order of one claim element over another or the temporal order in which acts of a method are performed, but are used merely as labels to distinguish one claim element having a certain name from another element having a same name (but for use of the ordinal term) to distinguish the claim elements. As used herein, “and/or” means that the listed items are alternatives, but the alternatives also include any combination of the listed items.

It is claimed:

1. An optical circuit switch, comprising:

a first optical circulator configured to form a first plurality of bidirectional optical beams from a first plurality of input optical beams and a corresponding first plurality of output optical beams, each bidirectional optical beam consisting of the corresponding input optical beam and the corresponding output optical beam overlaid to follow, in opposing directions, a common optical path;

a first mirror array disposed to reflect the first plurality of bidirectional optical beams;

a second mirror array disposed to intercept bidirectional optical beams reflected from the first minor array and to reflect at least some of the intercepted bidirectional beams to form a second plurality of bidirectional beams; and

a second optical circulator configured to separate the second plurality of bidirectional optical beams into a corresponding second plurality of input optical beams and a corresponding second plurality of output optical beams.

2. An optical circuit switch, comprising:

a first optical circulator configured to overlay N first input optical beams and N corresponding first output optical beams to provide N first bidirectional optical beams, where N is an integer greater than one;

a first mirror array having at least N mirrors, the mirror array disposed to reflect the N first bidirectional optical beams, each of the N bidirectional optical beams reflecting from a respective one of the at least N minors;

a second mirror array disposed to intercept at least some of the N first bidirectional optical beams reflected from the mirror array and to reflect the intercepted bidirectional optical beams to provide second bidirectional optical beams; and

a second optical circulator configured to separate the second bidirectional optical beams into respective second input optical beams and second output optical beams.

3. The optical circuit switch of claim 2, further comprising: a first set of N ports, each port including an input connector to receive an input signal and an output connector to provide an output signal;

a first set of N collimator lenses to respectively convert the input signals from the first set of N ports into the N first input optical beams; and

a first set of N focusing lenses to respectively convert the N output optical beams into the output signals for the first set of N ports.

4. The optical circuit switch of claim 3, further comprising: a second set of ports, each port including an input connector to receive a respective input signal and an output connector to provide a respective output signal;

a second set of collimator lenses to respectively convert the input signals from the second set of ports into the second input optical beams; and

a second set of focusing lenses to respectively convert the second set of output optical beams into the output signals for the second set of ports.

5. The optical circuit switch of claim 2, further comprising: a controller coupled to the first minor array and to the second mirror array, the controller configured to control rotation angles of at least some mirrors in the first minor array and the second minor arrays to make a bidirectional optical connection between any one of the first set of ports and any one of the second set of ports.

6. A method of switching optical connections, comprising: forming a first plurality of bidirectional optical beams from a first plurality of input optical beams and a corresponding first plurality of output optical beams, each bidirectional optical beam consisting of the corresponding input optical beam and the corresponding output optical beam overlaid to follow, in opposing directions, a common optical path;

reflecting the first plurality of bidirectional optical beams from a first mirror array;

intercepting the bidirectional optical beams reflected from the first minor array at a second minor array;

reflecting, by the second minor array, at least some of the intercepted bidirectional beams to form a second plurality of bidirectional beams; and

separating the second plurality of bidirectional optical beams into a corresponding second plurality of input optical beams and a corresponding second plurality of output optical beams.

7. A method of switching optical connections, comprising: overlaying N first input optical beams and N corresponding first output optical beams to provide N first bidirectional optical beams, where N is an integer greater than one;

reflecting the N first bidirectional optical beams by a first mirror array having at least N mirrors, each of the N bidirectional optical beams reflecting from a respective one of the at least N mirrors;

intercepting, at a second mirror array, at least some of the N first bidirectional optical beams reflected from the first minor array;

reflecting the intercepted bidirectional optical beams by the second minor array to provide second bidirectional optical beams; and
 separating the second bidirectional optical beams into respective second input optical beams and second output optical beams. 5

8. The method of claim 7, further comprising:

providing a first set of N ports, each port including an input connector to receive an input signal and an output connector to provide an output signal; 10

respectively collimating the input signals from the first set of N ports to form the N first input optical beams; and

respectively focusing the N first output optical beams to form the output signals for the first set of N ports.

9. The method of claim 8, further comprising: 15

providing a second set of ports, each port including an input connector to receive a respective input signal and an output connector to provide a respective output signal;

respectively collimating the input signals from the second set of ports to form the second input optical beams; and 20

respectively focusing the second set of output optical beams to form the output signals for the second set of ports.

10. The method of claim 9, further comprising: 25

controlling rotation angles of at least some mirrors in the first mirror array and the second mirror arrays to make a bidirectional optical connection between any one of the first set of ports and any one of the second set of ports.

* * * * *

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UNITED STATES PATENT AND TRADEMARK OFFICE
CERTIFICATE OF CORRECTION

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DATED : June 23, 2015
INVENTOR(S) : Shifu Yuan, Nan Luo and Changbao Ma

Page 1 of 1

It is certified that error appears in the above-identified patent and that said Letters Patent is hereby corrected as shown below:

In the claims,

Column 9, line 51 : replace “minor” with --mirror--

Column 9, line 67 : replace “minors” with --mirror--

Column 10, line 30 : replace “minor” with --mirror--

Column 10, line 32 : replace “minor” with --mirror--

Column 10, line 33 : replace “minor” with --mirror--

Column 10, line 47 : replace “first minor” with --first mirror--

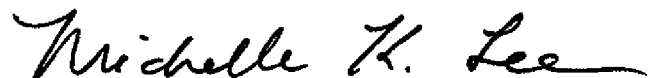
Column 10, line 47 : replace “second minor” with --second mirror--

Column 10, line 48 : replace “minor” with --mirror--

Column 10, line 65 : replace “minor” with --mirror--

Column 11, line 2 : replace “minor” with --mirror--

Signed and Sealed this
Twenty-fourth Day of November, 2015



Michelle K. Lee
Director of the United States Patent and Trademark Office